

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SMS-01 CIAE-00 INR-10
NSAE-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 DODE-00 MCT-02
/063 W

-----003820 300502Z /12

R 291335Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6147
INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
AMEMBASSY DOHA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMEMBASSY MANAMA
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
USLO RIYADH
AMEMBASSY SANA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

S E C R E T MOSCOW 20691

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, YS, UR
SUBJECT: SOVIETS IN SOUTH ARABIA

REF: (A) STATE 204565, (B) SANA 4053

1. EMBASSY WELCOMES OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT ON REFTELS.
WE AGREE THAT THE SOVIETS OVER TIME PROBABLY WANT TO
ESTABLISH A STRONG, UNASSAILABLE POSITION IN PDRY AND USE
IT TO ADVANCE SOVIET STRATEGY ON THE SOUTH ARABIAN PENIN-
SULA, WHICH AT LEAST IN PART AIMS TO "COMPLICATE OUR
ACCESS TO OIL AND OUR ABILITY TO DEAL WITH ANY ARAB

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REGIME" (REF B). AS TO THE QUESTION OF THE RELATIVE ROLE
OF IDEOLOGICAL-PARTY AND GEOPOLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS
BROACHED IN REF B, THEY ARE USUALLY CLOSELY ENTWINED AND
DO NOT APPEAR TO BE INCOMPATIBLE IN THIS CASE.
RECENT EVENTS HAVE PROBABLY ENCOURAGED THE SOVIETS TO
PLACE A BIT MORE CONFIDENCE IN THE IDEOLOGICAL CONSTANCY
OF THE REGIME IN SOUTH YEMEN.

2. HAVING BEEN BURNED BADLY IN SOMALIA, HOWEVER, THE SOVIETS MUST ALSO LOOK ON THE ADEN REGIME WITH WARINESS ABOUT ITS LONG-TERM VIABILITY. PERIODIC PRESS CAMPAIGNS SUGGESTING IMMINENT CONFLICT IN THE REGION BETRAY CONCERN ABOUT ITS STABILITY (MOSCOW 19959 AND 15602); ONE DOES NOT GET THE IMPRESSION FROM THESE REPORTS THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE DECISIVELY DEFEATED SAUDIS AND OTHER LOCAL FOES OR THAT THEIR POSITION IS FORMIDABLE, AS SUGGESTED REF B. WE SUSPECT THERE IS SOME DOUBT HERE ABOUT THE SUITABILITY OF SOUTH YEMEN AS AN AGENT FOR DEVELOPING SOVIET INFLUENCE DUE TO ITS RADICALNESS, UNPREDICTABILITY AND HISTORICALLY BAD RECORD OF MANAGING RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS.

3. IF IT IS TRUE THAT THERE IS SOME INSECURITY ON THE SOVIET PART ABOUT ITS TOE-HOLD IN PDRY, WE WOULD EXPECT MOSCOW TO WORK FOR A CONSOLIDATION OF ITS PRESENCE BEFORE EXPLOITING THE SITUATION FOR LONGER GAINS. OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT OVER THE SHORT RUN, THE SOVIETS WILL TRY TO EXTRACT WHAT THEY CAN FROM THE MILITARY FACILITIES ADEN CAN OFFER, AND OPERATE WITH A LOW PROFILE TO AVOID AROUSING A GENERAL ALARM IN THE REGION WHICH CAN LEAD TO PROBLEMS, AS THEY ARE BEGINNING TO APPRECIATE IN AFRICA. THE SOVIET UNDOUBTEDLY FIGURE TIME IS ON THEIR SIDE BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE:

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-- THE CONSERVATIVE ARAB REGIMES ARE DESTINED TO BE OVERTHROWN SOONER OR LATER;

-- DESPITE POSSIBLE SHORT-TERM AGREEMENTS ON PERIPHERAL ISSUES, OUR BASIC INTERESTS AND THOSE OF THE ARAB STATES ARE ULTIMATELY INCOMPATIBLE VIS-A-VIS THE ISRAELI QUESTION

-- CONFLICTING ECONOMIC INTERESTS WILL INEVITABLY WIDEN THE GAP BETWEEN THEIR POLICIES AND OURS.

4. ALTHOUGH SUCH CALCULATIONS WON'T PREVENT THE SOVIETS FROM MAKING THEIR MOVE WHEN AN EASY TARGET OF OPPORTUNITY OR A LACK OF DETERMINATION ON THE PART OF THEIR ADVERSARIES IS IDENTIFIED, WE DON'T SENSE THAT MOSCOW RATES THE REGIMES ARRAYED AGAINST PDRY AS RIPE FOR EXPLOITATION AT THE PRESENT TIME. SHORT OF HARD EVIDENCE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER, WE SENSE THAT MOSCOW WILL WANT TO GO SLOW BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO LAUNCH ANY SERIOUS PROJECTS TO EXTEND ITS TOE-HOLD. GARRISON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, POLITICAL SITUATION, MILITARY CAPABILITIES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 aug 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MOSCOW20691
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780353-0733
Format: TEL
From: MOSCOW
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780813/aaaaakug.tel
Line Count: 113
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 49dff759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 204565, 78 SANA 4053
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1591478
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOVIETS IN SOUTH ARABIA
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, MILI, MPOL, YS, UR
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/49dff759-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014